

AMERICAN EMERGENCIES: WHITENESS,
THE NATIONAL GUARD, AND *LIGHT IN AUGUST*

White Blood

Right before the National Guard emerges in William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) as a bicycle-riding, uniformed Grim Reaper who packs a pistol and wields a butcher knife, the novel flashes forward so that the reader can meet Gavin Stevens, Jefferson's "District Attorney, [who is] a Harvard graduate [and] a Phi Beta Kappa" (444). Stevens's character serves two functions in the novel: to escort the exhausted Mrs. Hines and her delirious husband, the raving white supremacist old Doc Hines, to Jefferson's train station, and to rehearse the story of Joe Christmas's death in order to prepare the reader for its direct narration in the pages that follow. Faulkner supplies Stevens with a ready listener, a nameless college professor and friend, who, coincidentally, disembarks from the train to pay the D. A. a surprise visit at the exact moment in which Stevens delivers the Hineses to their train car. As they travel from the train station back to Stevens's home, Stevens spins a classically Gothic tale about the last moments of Christmas's life as a panicky, interior struggle of blood against blood, fetishizing and racializing his liquid interiors by repeating the terms "black blood" and "white blood" (448-49).¹ Christmas's white blood, Stevens explains, provides him with moral reasoning, but his black blood rises against it, pushing him to pistol-whip Reverend Hightower and, ultimately, sweeping him into an ecstatic state in which "death is desire and fulfillment" (449).

The District Attorney relies upon a Gothic encoding of what he understands to be the divide between black and white, speaking the language of early-American writers for whom blackness, for the most part, signifies evil and the Devil's work, and whiteness, usually, signifies purity and religious illumination.² The lawyer's re-presentation of early-American Gothic rhetoric as a modern dis-

¹By "classic Gothic," I mean a tale of terror designed to thrill its reader with its representations of evil, shadows, and fear. See Fiedler's description of the early-American Gothic as a literature replete with "images of alienation, flight, and abysmal fear" (143). Toni Morrison explains racial fetishization as a narrative technique by which the author "evok[es] erotic fears or desires and establish[es] fixed or major difference where difference does not exist or is minimal. Blood, for example, is a pervasive fetish: black blood, white blood, the purity of blood; the purity of white female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex. Fetishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery" (68).

²Harry Levin and Fiedler, as well as the more recent work of Teresa Goddu, name Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, among others, as classic American Gothic writers. For a reevaluation of how Gothic blackness and whiteness must be understood in racial terms, in particular in terms of the haunting of early-American literature by slavery, see Goddu and Morrison.

course of blood not only conflates the moral with the racial, but also, as spoken by the voice of law and education, authorizes such a discourse as learned, reasoned, and natural. Staged as a one-sided conversation between two ivy league-educated white men, Stevens's monologue represents how the Gothic infiltrates modern racial thought, so much so that even Faulkner's Harvard-educated, state-representative lawman speaks of mixed-race in terms of a mythic—one might say eugenic—battle between good and evil blood pools. The silence of the emergent professor, who never interrupts, signals that he accepts, or at least remains mesmerized by, Stevens's fantastic narrative as a truth.

Stevens's interpretation of whiteness as the moral and racial force that drives Christmas away from the darkness of blackness emerges near the end of a novel that has already implicated whiteness in its Gothic structure. As Faulkner's readers are already aware, and as I will explore later in this essay, Joe Christmas's racial ambiguity colors the way that Jefferson's townspeople understand themselves as occupying a normative whiteness that differs from the whiteness of those ostracized by the community, especially Joanna Burden. Stevens's focus on the activity of white blood, as it resists and struggles against the blackness inside Christmas's body, distinctly ignores the other presence of whiteness in the scene he narrates—the whiteness of the force that ultimately destroys Christmas, not his "blood," but the National Guard, embodied by Percy Grimm. Unlike Stevens, who pictures racial antagonism as a Gothic horror of embattled bodily interiors, this essay redirects the (white) intellectual's gaze to see the Gothic materiality of racial whiteness—the novel's simultaneous articulation of and collapse between the National Guard and the Southern lynch mob, a representation of whiteness as a racialized force of history and terror.³

Gothic Whiteness

The contemporary turn in Gothic criticism to account for the particularities of race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality "posts" the classic interpretations of Gothic representations of darkness and light, especially as Gothic studies intersects with what has become known as whiteness studies in the academy.⁴ This essay will articulate a theory of Gothic whiteness that examines the connection between Faulkner's Southern Gothic and national history, once Faulkner's novel is understood as a national emergency narrative. Whereas Stevens's monologue explains the Gothic undoing of Joe Christmas as the result of an archetypal struggle between dark and light, this essay will demonstrate how, at the novel's close, the narrative disentangles "whiteness" from Stevens's understanding of it as a morally-infused, blood-based racial category, and reimagines whiteness as tied to the horror of state-based violence that is predicated on the imagination of a pure "America," a national signifier that stands apart from the body and its imperfect borders. Gothic

³For more on the representation of whiteness as terrorizing, see hooks (165-78) and McLaren.

⁴See Wiegman and Stokes for an important critical articulation of the academic rise of whiteness studies in the U.S. academy.

whiteness, I argue, is not only the besmirchment of what otherwise gets marked as supremely whitened, but also the haunting of white, abstract personhood by the white body it so desperately seeks to repress.⁵ Such a reading gives primary importance to the novel's opposition between national enemies and the National Guard and the textual inscription of what looks like national security but, in Faulkner's novel, ends up as a form of local, racialized terrorism.

While *Light in August* functions as an exemplary modern American Gothic text, an analysis of how Percy Grimm, as both white supremacist and National Guardsman, enhances the novel's Gothic structure has been ignored in favor of psychoanalytic readings of Joe Christmas (as a "depressed narcissist") or the novel's representations of the "haunted house" (Jarraway 63; Polk 24, 29-30). Teresa Goddu has argued that "the gothic, like all discourses, needs to be historicized" and that "the gothic tells of the historical horrors that make national identity possible yet must be repressed in order to sustain it" (2,10). Additionally, Eric Savoy has pointed out that, once the Gothic emerges, it does not provide a newer, more complete version of national history. Instead, the Gothic resists its telling in any complete and final form. It "irrupts by fits and starts in a semiotic that is fragmentary, one that is more suggestive than conclusive" of national history's frightening and forgotten past (Savoy 8). An analysis of Gothic whiteness in *Light in August*, therefore, requires understanding the novel's relationship to the historical development of new forms of military defense in the early-twentieth century, and how this part of U.S. history converges with and is, in part, made possible by the more repressed story of white supremacy in the modern South. Digging up the history of the National Guard (however fragmented or suggestive such research might be), then, is like uncovering the buried parts of a Gothic secret.

The National Guard

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, officially-sanctioned, militarized actions inside the U.S. changed the look of the nation during times of civil unrest. With the passing of the Dick Act of 1903, the National Defense Act of 1916, and the National Defense Act Amendments of 1920, the federal government authorized the training and inspection of state and local militias so that members of each could officially become citizen-soldiers, or members of the National Guard—a presence that signals the militarized containment of national emergencies.⁶ Members of the National Guard were, and still are, simultaneously enlisted in both the federal and state National Guard (each state having its own National Guard), thus creating double identities for their recruits: he who is both civilian and soldier, with an understanding of defense at both the local and national level.

⁵My understanding of white, abstract personhood comes directly from Lauren Berlant's by now familiar argument about the national body and white male privilege: "[W]hite male privilege has been veiled by the rhetoric of the bodiless citizen, the generic 'person' whose political identity is *a priori* precisely because it is, in theory, non-corporeal" (112).

⁶For a full history of the transformation of local American militias into the National Guard, see Cooper. See also the U.S. Advisory 7-12.

Membership in the National Guard offered the promise of militarized modernization for white men.⁷ The institutionalization of uniforms, camps, and drills, as well as the formation of ranks and the regulation of weapons, assisted in disciplining and federalizing a whiteness that belonged to the masses—the anonymous crowd, the unorganized militia, the mass of roiling strikers, or even the lynch mob—and thus resignified local or regional whiteness as the official domain of the U.S. military. According to a 1993 report by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, the primary duties of the modern National Guard are to “suppress insurrections” (guarding against internal rebellions and uprisings) and “repel invasions” (guarding against external threats) (8). The citizen-soldier’s purpose is to militaristically patrol the nation during the time of national emergency, strategically configuring and reconfiguring the insides and outsides of the nation depending on where, exactly, the perceived national threat emerges. The force of the National Guard as a metaphor, therefore, depends on the second term of its phrase, “guard,” which connotes a border position designed to seal national meaning into a protected geopolitical totality.

During the height of literary modernism, four kinds of national emergency narratives produced the National Guard: the natural disaster; those involving labor disputes and striking workers; those involving race, gender, and sexuality; and those in which the National Guard is mobilized on or over the border as a reserve force supplementing the Regular Army (Cooper 146-52). The narration of the Nationally Guarded event takes place within a peculiar temporal structure, one that builds with an alarmingly steady momentum and which speeds forward by moments of panic and violence. The violent movement from local crisis to national emergency suggests that, when the National Guard shows up in the political landscape, the nation itself threatens to burst, turning itself inside out. The borders of the nation are redefined in the emergency moment, a moment that contains a peopled excess whose violent destruction satiates America’s desire for imaginary political and narrative safety.

As the National Guard entered into its third official decade of existence, the 1930s, Faulkner published *Light in August*, a novel that calls in the National Guard to oversee what can be understood, in the light of the above informa-

⁷On the working-class status of National Guardsmen, see Cooper 151. I racialize early formations of the National Guard as “white” to stress how Jim Crow laws prevented African Americans from fully achieving National Guardsman status. Lt. Col. (Ret.) Michael Lee Lanning explains how, just as black soldiers were segregated from whites in the formation of troops for battle during WWI: “Blacks also realized fewer opportunities to serve in the state militia—now known as the National Guard. Both the military and the state governments defined the Militia Act of 1903 as limiting federal control of the National Guard. All agreed that the racial composition of the National Guard remained a state prerogative and, as a result, many state units no longer accepted blacks. By the time the United States entered WWI in 1917, the National Guard contained only five thousand African American men, less than three percent of its total. . . . No black unit or black man served in the National Guard of any of the Deep South states” (102). Lanning describes the absence of African American National Guardsmen during the 1930s in a similar way: “All thirty of the National Guard regiments that formed its sixteen authorized divisions were all white. . . . By 1939 blacks totaled only about 2 percent of the strength of the Regular Army and National Guard” (157). On the “purging” of black men from Southern state National Guards during the first decade of the twentieth century, see Cooper 137.

tion, as a national emergency narrative.⁸ Central to the plot is the mysteriously dead body of a white woman, Joanna Burden, who is assumed to have been murdered in cold blood at the hands of Joe Christmas, a character whose racial ambiguity puzzles other characters in the text as well as Joe himself.⁹ Christmas is assumed to have raped Burden. At the end of the novel, Christmas ends up incarcerated and draws an angry white mob that clamors for his lynching. He also ends up under the "protection" of the National Guard. A narrative that involves the accusation of interracial murder and rape constitutes a national emergency, a narrative familiar enough to 1930s readers who knew that the National Guard was regularly called out during the early-twentieth century to prevent the lynching of black men accused of interracial rape or murder (Cooper 46-49). While the presence of the National Guard in *Light in August* guarantees that the story of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden is, indeed, a national emergency narrative, the presence of the National Guard does not guarantee that the meaning of the modern nation in the time of emergency is ever anything more than a horrifying reminder of how the state has absolute power over who counts as worth guarding in the name of the nation and who does not.

Because, as far as I can tell, there has been very little work done on the National Guard as an object of literary and cultural studies, I preface my analysis of Faulkner's novel with a re-presentation of early-twentieth century texts written by or for U.S. National Guardsmen to show how the state tries to breathe life into the otherwise stagnant bodies of rural white men who made up its early configurations.¹⁰ Such an approach explains two things: 1) how the National Guard makes citizen-soldiers out of armed residents, and 2) how National Guard narratives characterize those marked as Other to the nation in times of emergency. National Guard narratives, I argue, call attention to how the borders of the body and the borders of the nation are, in military discourse, as in Faulkner's Gothic novel, always the same thing.

A Clean and Orderly White Mob

As local militias turned into National Guard units, a number of publications were printed to assist the citizen-soldier with his duties as a combatant, as well as to remind him of what it means to take on an identity that is attached to national importance. Such publications stress the important overlap between the proper, hygienic male body and the disciplined,

⁸Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* might also be thought of as a national emergency narrative, with its representation of the National Guard protecting the prison that houses Bigger Thomas from white mobs who scream for his lynching. Wright's posthumously published novel, *Lawd Today!* (written in the 1930s, but published in the 1960s), features a character, Al, who is an African American member of the National Guard. *Lawd Today!* follows its main character, Jake Jackson, and three of his buddies, Bob, Al, and Slim, all of whom are postal workers who drink, talk, play cards, chase women, and get into fights. Al, the National Guardsman, has the largest body of the four men, weighing in at "two hundred and fifty pounds" (76). See also *Native Son* 367, 377, 381, 383, and 405.

⁹Joe Christmas's "black" body is actually "parchmentcolored" (120).

¹⁰One notable exception is James Gibson's analysis of the culture of violence and contemporary U.S. masculinity. For more on how militarism finds its way into men's recreation and leisure activities, see Gibson.

obedient body of the soldier.¹¹ The Gothic materializes in the National Guardsmen's training, however, in three different ways: as corporeal abjection, as a paranoid threat that the guardsman will turn into a member of an anarchic mob, and as a polluting, national Other that lurks at the borders of the nation.

Captain Cromwell Stacey, for example, published a handbook for new National Guardsmen in 1916 called *Company Training (Infantry)*. *Company Training* begins with "The Rules of the Game for Enlisted Men of the National Guard," a list that tells recruits how to behave like citizen-soldiers (Stacey 5).¹² Rule One declares that "The first duty of a soldier is loyalty, unhesitating obedience. Without this quality an army is no better than a mob. . . . One hundred disciplined men are always superior to a thousand undisciplined men" (5). Rule Four repeats this admonition, the citizen-soldier should "[g]et the reputation of being a fine military organization, and not that of a uniformed mob" (5). Throughout Stacey's training manual, there exists a primary anxiety over the collapse of the National Guard into an inefficient mob of untrained men: "I have heard many National Guard officers say: 'This is not the Regular Army and we can't have the same discipline.' True, *but you can try*. The nearer you approach to the Regular Army standard the better organization you will have and the more efficient your company will be" (9). The difference between mob, Guard, and Army, is only a matter of degrees. According to Stacey, the Guard aspires to Army-status, but worries it might actually be nothing more than a mob in uniform. The training manual, therefore, is crucial for determining the difference between a mob and the Guard; it is a literary reminder of how to discipline the body, how to make the body look like and act like a nation. As a result, the manual reviews the kinds of training citizen-soldiers need for attack and defense—how to march, patrol, lunge, strike, parry, thrust, point, and guard, as well as how to take care of parts of the body most susceptible to invasion: its orifices.

The cleanliness of the military body begins, as it were, in the kitchen and ends, surely, in the outhouse or latrine. Stacey's training manual orders the care of the mouth and the anus, of knowing the difference between food and feces, as a part of training the Guard: "Watch your kitchens like a hawk. They must be clean as a pin. Watch your cooks and see that they bathe daily and always have on clean clothes" (114).¹³ To guard the kitchen is to protect the

¹¹See, in particular, Donovan and Dieges, as well as the U.S. Militia Bureau, *Questions and National*.

¹²Stacey was not a National Guardsman, but rather a Captain in the Regular Army, a U.S. Infantry Inspector and Instructor. As he puts it in his introduction, "I know the trials and tribulations of the National Guard captains as well as if I had been one myself" (4). An uncanny identification with the National Guard identity is what makes this captain the authority on, and the author of, National Guardsmen training.

¹³As hawkishly as National Guardsmen are asked to watch their kitchens, so, too, must the reader keep a close eye on kitchens and the kitchen-esque in *Light in August*. The novel begins the story of Christmas with his vomiting of toothpaste in the dietician's closet (122); he trashes the food Mrs. McEachern brings him after his beating, then eats it in the corner of his room "with his hands . . . like a savage, like a dog" (155); at eighteen, he begins a relationship with the waitress Bobbie Allen at the diner's kitchen lunch counter (179); in his thirties, he breaks into the Burden house through an open window leading to the kitchen (229); and, finally, he ends up shot and then mutilated with a butcher knife by Percy Grimm on the floor of Reverend Hightower's kitchen (464). Like the instructions that train the National Guard, this series of beginnings set in kitchens also act as scenes of discipline for Christmas; however, unlike the bodies of trained citizen-soldiers, Christmas's unruly body ends up, in all cases, unable to swallow the rules of others.

body from a filthy oral invasion. The threat to the body lies outside its borders and is brought into the body only if one is caught off guard. In addition to the mouth, the Guard needs to be reminded of how to be on guard against anything that might cling to its uncanny double, the anus:

You must secure toilet paper; no matter how you get it, but you must have it. . . . If you don't do this, men will use newspaper, or more frequently not use any paper at all, none being available. This method will soon produce piles, and you will have men on sick report as a result. Rears must be made comfortable; otherwise men will not use them and will get in the habit of going off in the bushes and defiling the campsite. (115)

Here the threat comes from inside the body. The threat, in this case, involves not being able to fully eliminate the body's excess, a threat of producing so much shit around the campsite that the whole place reeks of it, drawing disease and contaminating the otherwise pure site of modern national-military body building. The National Guard grooms the animalistic, rural bodies of white men, refining their rituals and habits so that each will fit into a more respectable, civilized national culture.

White Borders and Hemispheric Filth

As the sanitary body of the soldier emerges from the provincial body of the citizen, so too does "America," as a narrative about the good, clean home, emerge as the National Guard polices the internal and external borders of the United States.¹⁴ The first national emergency during which the National Guard was mobilized was the result of an attack from below, just south of the U.S. border. In March 1916, President Woodrow Wilson called out National Guardsmen to—literally—line the U.S.-Mexico border and guard against Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa, whose army crossed the border into Columbus, New Mexico and killed nineteen U.S. citizens (Cooper 156-63).¹⁵

During that time, Irving Goff McCann, a Captain in the Illinois State National Guard, wrote a short book that chronicles his travels to and experiences at Camp Wilson (now Camp Travis), just outside of San Antonio, Texas. McCann's book, *With the National Guard on the Border: Our National Military Problem* (1917), is a record of his life with the National Guard as it was stationed in close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. Much like the training manual's investment in the hygienic body of the citizen-soldier, McCann's narrative describes the border between the United States and Mexico as a division between clean and dirty. According to McCann, the U.S.-Mexico border is

¹⁴My reading of "America" stems from Wiegman's analysis of "the story of America" as "that infinitely rhetorical figure that secures itself through multiple historicizing narratives of geopolitical destiny and chosen peoples," a "mythological text that functions to weld disparities together" (115). This mythological text "offers the singularity of identity as its triumphant resolution, a resolution that incorporates the fragmented excesses of social scripting into a narrative of continuity and unification [where] fragmentation is transformed into fusion, and 'America' emerges as the integrating sign for a more encompassing definition" (174).

¹⁵For a cultural analysis of the representation of the border and Pancho Villa, see Wilson 340-61.

The boundary line between the heaven of American liberty and internal peace and the purgatory of Mexican filth, disease, illiteracy, despotism, and revolution. . . . Mexico is . . . a fresh wound and a clot of blood on the Western Hemisphere. . . . Under the direction of the sanitary experts of the United States Army, Mexico would receive its first national bath, and its health conditions be vastly improved. (22, 23, 43)

McCann's nationalist idiom finds expression in bodily abjection. He imagines the Western Hemisphere as a body of which Mexico is a part—filthy, blood-stained, and disease-ridden—and then conjures an image of American military devastation as that which would not only do some cleaning, but that which would give dirty parts of the hemispheric body a bath.

I call attention to Captain Stacey's and Captain McCann's National Guard narratives in order to show how the project of making the citizen-soldier overlaps with the project of constructing national borders during times of "emergency." What emerges, in both of the above narratives, is matter that must be eliminated, and the projection of that filth onto a national Other across the border—a process of U.S. abjection that keeps nation and body whole and pure or, as McCann would have it, a "heaven of liberty and internal peace." It is with these representations of the National Guard in mind that I turn to Faulkner's *Light in August*, a novel that waits to introduce its one National Guardsman until the end of the book, in the second to last chapter.

Percy Grimm appears quite suddenly, materializing out of nowhere, so it seems, and commits an act of violence so brutal that it might easily distract the reader from the fact that he, like Captain McCann and Captain Stacey, is a military captain—a captain in the Mississippi National Guard.¹⁶ His membership in the Guard matters, I suggest, not only because he is one of several characters for whom, as one Faulkner scholar puts it, "filth and abomination provide the categories in terms of which they understand most of life," but also because his presence marks the story of Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas as a national emergency narrative (Minter 132). And like many authors who are writing modern Gothic novels in the U.S. South, Faulkner is less interested in representing "America" as the "heaven of liberty and internal peace," as McCann sees it, and more interested in writing a novel about how the nation generates its own terrifying and uncanny specters of difference, detailing, as he does, the body and its fluids to serve as a metaphor for what Laura Doyle has recently called "a living entity under siege from itself yet constituting itself in the process" (339). Because I am interested in both the representation of the National Guard and the Gothic narrative that

¹⁶With the important exception of Jay Watson's groundbreaking essay "Writing Blood," there are no critical accounts of Percy Grimm as National Guardsman (see note 22 below). Even Watson, in his earlier essay "Overdoing Masculinity in *Light in August*," posits that Joe Christmas "dies at the hands of Jefferson's gender guard," and that the hunting for and castration of Christmas "should be read as the single sustained performance of a communal gender guard seeking to police the vertiginous masculine difference of Joe Christmas" (158). In "Overdoing," Watson builds his thesis around what he calls the "gender guard" but, like all critics, does not mention the National Guard. Such a critical displacement raises two interrelated questions: Why does the National Guard resist interpretation? Why is the National Guard a trope that shuts down critical imagination about its own particularity? It is almost as if, even in its textual form, the Guard imperceptibly enforces an interpretive order, and a fear of this order, that contains the reading of its own production as if it were a dangerous, emergent excess.

produces its presence, I will first sketch the emergencies of race and gender that surround the coming together of Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, so that we can see why it is that the National Guard is that which joins them, finally, in death. The critical transformation of both characters in the minds of Jefferson's white public signals the emergence of a new fantasy about whiteness that, in turn, drives the novel's emergency forward to its bloody end. I begin with an analysis of Joanna Burden's transformation from white foreigner and enemy to Southern white lady, go on to explain the inversion of Joe Christmas's identity from foreigner to "nigger," and then interpret Percy Grimm as the emergency narrative's nearly dead white citizen turned live National Guardsman.

Threatening White Supremacy

*L*ight in August revolves around a gruesome event that takes place in the small town of Jefferson, Mississippi, one that escalates into an emergency of national proportions: the butchering of Joanna Burden (nearly severing her head from her body, but leaving intact a bit of gristle that connects the two) and the torching of her family's property. Joanna Burden's slaughter produces a local crisis and, ultimately, a national emergency not only because she is a white woman who lives alone in a small, Southern town, but also because she is a white woman who, in keeping with a long family tradition, turns Mississippi racial relations inside out because she associates with and advocates for blacks living in the U.S. South. No matter how much time the Burden family has lived, worked, and reproduced in Mississippi, the town of Jefferson does not consider them Southerners, but a regionally defined enemy who has erupted from within.

And here's why: from at least the early-nineteenth-century, Joanna's grandfather, Calvin Burden, raucously speaks out against slavery, and eventually kills another white man in the name of abolitionism (242). During the Reconstruction, Joanna's grandfather and father travel "east, to Washington, and [get] a commission from the government to come down [to Jefferson, Mississippi] to help with the freed negroes" (251). The Burdens, therefore, act as agents of the Freedman's Bureau. Finally, years later, in Jefferson, the second Calvin Burden (Joanna's half-brother, grandson of the first) is killed (by a white man) over "a question of negro voting" (248). Joanna Burden explains what this means very clearly. She tells Christmas, "They hated us here. We were Yankees. Foreigners. Worse than foreigners: enemies. Carpet baggers. And it—the [Civil] War— still too close for even the ones that got whipped to be very sensible. Stirring up the negroes to murder and rape, they called it. Threatening white supremacy" (249). In the early part of the twentieth century, Joanna Burden continues her family's legacy as a sign of that which "threatens white supremacy" by working as a liaison between the administrators of Southern black schools and universities and African American female citizens. Even though Joanna was born and raised in Jefferson, her labor and history sully her whiteness, differentiating it from the purity of whiteness that belongs to other white Southerners. Publicly, her non-South-

ern whiteness makes her a foreigner, a Yankee, and an enemy who is "mixed up with niggers" (53). As a result, she lives in isolation from other whites while she continues to provide advice to "the presidents and faculties and trustees [of black schools], [as well as] advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnae, of a dozen negro schools and colleges throughout the [S]outh" (233). Joanna Burden's death, therefore, signals the end of generation upon generation of white patronage of blacks in the midst of a region saturated by white supremacy.¹⁷

Burden's position outside of white normativity ("a foreigner, an enemy") instantly changes the day that her nearly beheaded white body is dragged out of its burning home and into the light of the morning sun (289; 91). In addition to white law and order (the sheriff, deputy, and marshal, along with firefighters), Burden's body brings with it the attention of a white mob that arrives "within thirty minutes . . . as though out of thin air . . . parties and groups ranging from single individuals to entire families. Still others came out from town in racing and blatting cars" (287). In the novel's economy of race and gender, Burden's public identity, at the moment of her death, transforms from Yankee-foreigner-enemy to violated Southern white woman whom the mob instantly identifies as one of their own. The narrator tells us that "[w]hile she was alive they [white men] would not have allowed their wives to call on her. When they were younger, children . . . they had called after her on the street, 'Nigger lover! Nigger lover!'" (291-92). Now, however, the spectacle of a dead white woman, with her throat cut, sends the white mob into a frenzy, collectively believing that "the body . . . cried out for vengeance," collectively asking, "*Who did it? Who did it? . . . Is he still free? Ah. Is he? Is he? . . . Is that him? Is that the one that did it? . . . By God, if that's him, what are we doing, standing around here? Murdering a white woman the black son of a . . .*" (290-91). In the instant that the mob discovers that she has been nearly decapitated, the historical specificity of Joanna Burden disappears; instead, mob logic rules, replacing the foreigner-enemy stigma with the mythic cover story of the unguarded Southern white lady. Her death puts into motion the beginnings of a lynching narrative, and the lynching narrative turns, finally, into a national emergency once it is discovered that the man whom everyone thought was a "foreigner" is actually a "negro" who has been sleeping and living with Joanna.¹⁸

Christmas's white cabin-mate, Joe Brown, alerts the unsuspecting public to Christmas's racial blackness, transforming Christmas's identity from a mysterious "foreigner" into the "nigger" of the lynching narrative. When Brown reveals "the truth" of Christmas's race to a surprised white police force—that Christmas

¹⁷I hesitate to describe the Burden family's work as "antiracist" since the Burden family history is conflicted: even as they die in the name of antislavery and in the name of electoral reform, the family understands blacks to be the white man's "burden," in need of white economic and political assistance.

¹⁸The dead body of a white woman in the South instantly conjures, in the minds of Jefferson's white inhabitants, the specter of the black rapist, so that, in addition to the slashing of her throat, the white mob "knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished, too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (288). The combination of certain murder and fantasized rape licenses the town's white inhabitants to find a racialized scapegoat, thus rendering all black men suspects (291).

is not a foreigner, as previously assumed,¹⁹ but that he is black—it not only secures Christmas's public role in the unfolding Gothic drama about interracial sex and murder, but also, importantly, exemplifies how racial blackness emerges out of national foreignness. Brown ridicules the white vigilantes and police force:

"That's right," [Brown] says. "Go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that's trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free. Accuse the white and let the nigger run."

"Nigger?" the sheriff said. "Nigger?"

... "You're so smart," he says. "The folks in this town is so smart. Fooled for three years. Calling him a foreigner for three years, when soon as I watched him three days I knew he wasn't no more a foreigner than I am. I knew before he even told me himself" ...

"You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about," the marshal says. "I don't care if he is a murderer or not."

"I'm talking about Christmas," Brown says. "The man that killed that white woman after he had done lived with her in plain sight of this whole town, and you all letting him get further and further away while you are accusing the one fellow that can find him for you, that knows what he done. He's got nigger blood in him." (97-98)

Christmas's racial identity supplies the already-in-crisis town of Jefferson with the information it is looking for, a racial truth that fits in with the myth of the black rapist: "A nigger," the marshal said. "I always thought there was something funny about that fellow . . . I'll attend to Christmas" (99). The emerging truth of Christmas, that he has claimed to be part-black, and that he has been having sex with Joanna Burden, assures the white police force that they have found their criminal, and that he will be "attended to" as the law sees fit. In the end, however, it is not the sheriff who attends to Christmas, but the sheriff does foreshadow who will: "[Christmas] better be careful, or Percy Grimm'll get him with that army of his" (423).

Percy Grimm and "America"

The sheriff's ironic reference to an army foreshadows the eventual materialization of what can only be described as Percy Grimm's veteran-militia, composed of members of the American Legion who, as one of them points out, "are not soldiers now," but whose "Post" Grimm will transform into a platoon, with himself in command (452). Those who form the squads that patrol the town square are veterans of past wars, not National Guardsmen and not currently enlisted men, but they do move

¹⁹The novel introduces Christmas as a "foreigner" at the planing mill, where the workers are distressed about Christmas's appearance: "something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home" (31). When the workers find out his name is Christmas, they add another layer of foreignness to him, differentiating "foreign" from "white": "Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?" the foreman said. "I never heard nobody a-tall named it," the other said" (33). Later, Byron remembers that "[t]hey just thought that he was a foreigner, and as they watched him for the rest of that Friday, working in that tie and the straw hat and the creased trousers, they said among themselves that that was the way men in his country worked" (33-34).

and act under the direction of Grimm and in the name of the nation. Grimm transforms Jefferson's veterans back into soldiers in order to make sure that no member of the Jefferson population decides to take the law into his own hands by lynching Christmas, who is, at this point, already in jail. Veterans reemerge as the soldiers they once were to make sure Jefferson's citizens do not emerge as a mob. This is a description of Percy Grimm talking to the American Legion:

"We got to preserve order," he said. "We must let the law take its course. The law. The nation. It is the right of no civilian to sentence a man to death. And we, the soldiers in Jefferson, are the ones to see to that."

"How do you know that anybody is planning anything different?" the legion commander said. "Have you heard any talk?"

"I dont know. I haven't listened. . . . That's not the question. It's whether or not we, as soldiers, that have worn the uniform are going to be the first to state where we stand. To show these people right off just where the government of the country stands on such things. . . . I thought it might be a good thing if I wear my uniform until this business is settled. So [the town] can see that Uncle Sam is present in more than spirit." (451-53)

Grimm's first priority, therefore, is ignorantly preemptive. He establishes the difference between citizen and soldier, to make sure the military's presence installs a fear in Jefferson's citizens who might be thinking of acting outside of the law.

The narrator alerts the reader to how Grimm's insistence on the difference between citizen and soldier is symptomatic of his own journey from being a natural-born Mississippi citizen to fully-saved National Guardsman:

He was about twentyfive and a captain in the State national guard. He had been born in the town and had lived there all his life save for the periods of summer encampments. He was too young to have been in the European War, though it was not until 1921 or '22 that he realised that he would never forgive his parents for that fact. . . . It was the new civilian-military act which saved him. (449-50)²⁰

The civilian-military act, explained above as the National Defense Act of 1916, "saves" Grimm, providing him with the national body he has been so desperately seeking. The narrator tells the reader that, prior to his enlistment in the National Guard, Grimm

was like a man who had been for a long time in a swamp, in the dark. It was as though he not only could see no path ahead of him, he knew that there was none. Then suddenly his life opened definite and clear. The wasted years in which he had shown no ability in school, in which he had been known as lazy, recalcitrant, without ambition, were behind him, forgotten. (450-51)

²⁰Notice that Faulkner capitalizes "State" instead of "national" and "guard," a reversal of how it is usually written: state National Guard. This unusual capitalization suggests that, in this scene, the nation is being rewritten not as a representation of the nation-state, but of something more like a state-nation, a nation top-heavy with the coercive power of the State as well as a nation in which the power of localized states—like the state of Mississippi—constructs the meaning of the nation on its own terms.

For Percy Grimm, any identity other than an American identity—a nationally militarized identity—is a wasted identity, one divorced from power. Before his identity as a citizen-soldier, Grimm absorbs those qualities attributed to the novel's "hot wet primogenitive Female" and "womanshenegro": the dark swamp, the unclear and sluggish, the unmanageable (115, 156). Membership in the Guard gives Grimm power by loosening him from the constraints of this body:

He could now see his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide, the burden which he now assumed and carried as bright and weightless and martial as his insignatory brass: a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience. (451)

For Percy Grimm (as it is in McCann's memoir), identification with the state produces a pure and shining American identity, one tied to "a belief that the *white race* is superior to any and all other races and that the *American* is superior to all other white races and the *American uniform* is superior to all men" (451; emphasis mine). Grimm's Gothic status as a "suffering," young, impoverished, Southern white male who wants "to tell [his story], to open his heart to" someone transforms into a new, more powerful, nationally identified white male (450).

As a result, Grimm's patriotic purpose spreads like wildfire. Grimm brings Uncle Sam into the small town of Jefferson and nationalizes the town by militarizing it. Soon enough, "without knowing that they were thinking about it, the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in that town . . . had been quicker and truer than theirs" (456-57). Thus Percy Grimm, a National Guard of one (for he is the only member of the National Guard in the book), not only transforms this local Southern region into a site of national pride (a site in which he will protect "America and Americans" [454]), but also enacts a Gothic collapse of the difference between the supposedly peacekeeping National Guard and the terroristic violence of the Southern white lynch mob.²¹ After Grimm organizes the American Legion into squads to prevent the townspeople from lynching Christmas, Christmas escapes into the crowd as a fire siren blares its "slow and sustained scream" (460). Grimm, in the name of the National Guard, hunts Christmas down, corners him, fires five shots into his body, slices off his genitals, and "fling[s] behind him the bloody butcher knife," exclaiming, "Now you'll leave white women alone, even in hell" (464).²²

²¹For more on the Gothic collapse of discrete binaries, see Halberstam 23.

²²Jay Watson nimbly argues that Grimm's modern nativist ideology, which combines national and racial supremacy and pride, motivates Grimm's slide from peacekeeper to butcher ("Writing" 83). According to Watson, Grimm agrees to guard Christmas "as long as he agrees to act white, to accept the constitutional protection afforded to all whites under nativist ideology." But as soon as Christmas races out of the white hands of the law, his mobility signals his refusal of national protection, making him both un-American and therefore, in the eyes of Grimm, black and also someone against whom more and more violence must be used to re-protect the (white) nation (83). See Watson, "Writing," especially 82-84.

Emergency's Ends

Faulkner's National Guardsman falls straight out of Captain Cromwell's training manual. Grimm moves exactly from the Gothic, history-laden, rural, impoverished white Southerner to the fetishistic fascist, hot for the American uniform and the flag and burning for the chance to waste whatever body troubles the order or crosses the borders of race and gender in Jefferson. Faulkner's Guard is singular and intimate, a one-on-one, body-to-body experience.²³ Percy Grimm chases and shoots Christmas, then uses his hand to search inside of Christmas's clothing for genitals that are held, sliced off with a butcher's knife, and tossed over his shoulder like garbage. For Faulkner, the Guard's work is direct, a terrible touching of National Guard and National Other, of citizen-soldier and criminal-enemy, lawman and outlaw. Grimm's violation of bodily borders in the name of America mirrors the description of the national border provided by the Guardsman McCann, a policing of the limits of the nation to expel what pollutes the sign of its most cherished interior (white women). Grimm generates a fiction that the National Guard will prevent citizens from turning into a mob, thwart the lynching of a black man, and protect women from rape and murder—none of which it does.

Grimm's last words about white women ends the novel's three-part articulation of white supremacy, which includes the Bible-inspired holiness of the white race espoused by Doc Hines, the eugenic theory of the white race espoused by Gavin Stevens, and the white nationalism of Grimm himself. The novel's awful conflation of National Guard and Southern lynch mob under the sign of whiteness acts as a powerful critique of modern America, signifying, as it does, the monstrosity of, not the racially ambiguous Joe Christmas, nor the novel's construction of all sorts of Others in the text (including woman, yankee, enemy, carpet-bagger, foreigner, and "nigger"), but the monstrosity of the state itself as an unstoppable agent of death.

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²³Elaine Scarry proposes that, during times of both war and peace, the body is where political learning and national identification registers. From involuntary gestures like raising one's eyebrows to the dismemberment of soldiers on the battlefield, Scarry argues that what is most visible during war is "the extremity or extreme literalness with which the nation inscribes itself in the body; or . . . literalness with which the human body opens itself and allows 'the nation' to be registered there in the wound" (112). This, I would argue, is what drives Percy Grimm's actions against Joe Christmas.

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